



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Preventing Rabies

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

[Matthew Reynolds] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds.

If you have a pet at home, you probably know how important it is to get them vaccinated against rabies. In fact, the rabies shot is required for dogs and cats in most places. Rabies is spread by the bite of an infected animal. The virus is most common in wild animals, but globally most human cases are still caused by dog bites. If you have a dog, cat, or ferret make sure you keep their vaccinations up-to-date. Also, keep your pet away from wild animals.

Each year more than \$300 million is spent to prevent rabies. And for good reason — rabies is fatal. Rabies is not very common in humans in the United States, but tens of thousands of people die from it in developing countries.

Here to speak with us today about rabies and how to protect ourselves and our pets is Dr. Charles Rupprecht, an expert from CDC on rabies prevention and control.

Welcome to the show, Dr. Rupprecht.

[Dr. Rupprecht] Thank you, Matthew. It's a pleasure to be here.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Rupprecht, I thought that rabies wasn't really a problem in the United States, but if we're spending \$300 million a year on preventing this disease rabies must be a bigger threat than I realized. How big a problem is rabies and where does all that money go?

[Dr. Rupprecht] Rabies is a disease of nature and although human rabies cases are no longer common there are reservoirs among wildlife, such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats, and whenever anybody gets exposed or a pet is attacked, a large number of things come into play. The animal has to be captured. The animal has to be submitted for diagnosis. People have to be evaluated for prophylaxis or vaccination. So there are a large number of variables or expenditures that occur any time an animal is suspected of having the disease.

[Matthew Reynolds] What would you say to the person who is listening to this and asking if you are going to treat rabies anyway, why should I bother with a vaccination for my pet?

[Dr. Rupprecht] Well Matthew, that's a very good question. There is really no treatment for rabies. Once clinical signs of the disease develop, it's essentially fatal. When we're talking about treatment, we're talking about wound care for the animal that's been attacked, immediate first aid, and if the animal's been vaccinated, it will be boosted. If the animal has not been vaccinated for rabies, there are only two recommendations. Either euthanasia because of the possibilities of it developing rabies and exposing members of the family, or keeping that animal under strict quarantine for at least 6 months.

[Matthew Reynolds] Would I be able to tell if an animal was infected with rabies? The common image I've heard is of a dog foaming at the mouth, but I suspect it might not be that obvious.

[Dr. Rupprecht] A lot of us tend to think of *Cujo* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* and these raging maniacal dogs. That's probably not the way that we're going to encounter rabies. In fact, the only characteristic thing about rabies is that it's uncharacteristic in the way that it presents, and so sometimes, wild animals may present more accustomed to people or unafraid of them, and sometimes our pets, if they were infected, may actually become more aggressive.

[Matthew Reynolds] As serious as rabies is, it seems like preventing it is the best strategy. I know that visits to the vet are often expensive and time consuming and I can see where some people might be tempted to skip pet vaccinations. How important is it to vaccinate our pets?

[Dr. Rupprecht] That's a very good question Matthew. What we want to do is to set up a barrier between ourselves and potentially rabid wildlife. One of the best single things we can do is to vaccinate our pets and set that up as a barrier between ourselves and the disease.

[Matthew Reynolds] What should a person do if their pet is attacked by a wild animal?

[Dr. Rupprecht] Being attacked by any animal is not only frightening, but also potentially an emergency situation. There are two primary things that one wants to do. We want to be able to get our pet to the veterinarian as soon as possible for any emergency care, to check on the vaccination status of our pet, and booster those vaccinations if necessary. The second thing is to contact our local animal control authorities to not only remove that potentially rabid animal from the community, but also have it sent for diagnoses to see if the animal is rabid and if our pet needs to be boosted with a vaccination or not.

[Matthew Reynolds] When it comes to the risk of rabies in humans, are there certain animals that cause greater concern?

[Dr. Rupprecht] In developing countries, we're most concerned about rabid dogs. In developed countries, such as the United States, the animals that are responsible for maintaining the disease in nature tend to be carnivores, such as skunks, raccoons, foxes, and bats.

[Matthew Reynolds] What should someone do if they have been bitten by an animal that might be infected?

[Dr. Rupprecht] One of the single most important things to do is proper wound care after you're bitten by a potentially rabid animal. That means cleaning the wound well with soap and water. After that, seek medical attention, and at the same time, either you or someone in your family or neighborhood contact local animal control authorities to try and capture the animal. That will not only remove the risk in the neighborhood, that will also allow the animal for evaluation to see if you may need rabies vaccination.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Rupprecht, thank you for taking the time to talk with us today.

[Dr. Rupprecht] You're welcome, Matthew. Thank you for inviting me.

[Matthew Reynolds] Well, that's it for this week's show. Don't forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Matthew Reynolds for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] To access the most accurate and relevant health information that affects you, your family and your community, please visit www.cdc.gov.